United Nations A/73/323

General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 August 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Item 54 of the provisional agenda*
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/83. On 4 May 2018, the Secretary-General sent notes verbale to all Member States and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of resolutions 72/80, 72/81, 72/82 and 72/83 and requesting that they submit information by 5 July 2018 concerning any action they had taken or envisaged in relation to the implementation of those resolutions. In response to the requests contained in paragraph 4 of resolution 72/80, paragraph 4 of resolution 72/81, paragraphs 37 and 38 of resolution 72/82 and paragraph 4 of resolution 72/83, the Assembly received information from India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the State of Palestine. The full texts of the replies are reproduced in the present report.

* A/73/150.

18-13433 (E) 300818

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 72/83, on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues.

2. On 4 May 2018, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all Member States, as well as to the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of resolutions 72/80, 72/81, 72/82 and 72/83 and requesting them to send information to him by 5 July 2018 on any actions they had taken or envisaged in relation to the implementation of those resolutions.

II. Replies received from Member States

India

[Original: English]
[1 June 2018]

The Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, with reference to its note verbale dated 4 May 2018, has the honour to report that the Government of India contributes to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), inter alia, in the ways below.

India has always been supportive of UNRWA efforts to secure sufficient, adequate and predictable resources for the duration of its mandate. Against the backdrop of the serious resource constraints faced by UNRWA, the Government of India has increased its annual financial contribution five-fold to the UNRWA core budget, from US$ 1 million in 2016 to US$ 5 million in 2018. The enhanced contribution to UNRWA was announced during the UNRWA Extraordinary Ministerial Conference, held in March 2018.

As part of its ongoing assistance programmes in Palestine to strengthen capacity-building efforts focused on institutions, services and training personnel, the Government of India provides 150 places for Palestinians every year in its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme. India also provides 100 scholarships to meritorious students under the General Scholarship Scheme of the Indian Council of Cultural Relationship. Those programmes are also available to Palestinian refugees. The Government of India started an annual Youth Exchange Programme with Palestine in 2017. Prime Minister Modi, during his visit to Palestine in February 2018, announced that the annual number of young people who took part in the programme had doubled, from 50 to 100. Palestine refugees also participate in the Youth Exchange Programme.

In addition, during the last five years, under an India-Palestine development partnership, 17 agreements have been signed in the fields of agriculture, health care, information technology, youth affairs, consular affairs, women's empowerment and media. Under those agreements, around US$ 70 million of financial support and project assistance has been offered for projects like post-2014 war reconstruction efforts in Gaza; the construction of five schools; the India-Palestine Centre of Excellence for Informational and Communication Technologies at the Al-Quds University, with a satellite centre in Ramallah; the India-Palestine Techno-park in Ramallah; a 100-bed super specialty hospital in Bethlehem; the post of India Studies Chair at the Al-Quds University; the construction of the Palestine Institute of Diplomacy in Ramallah; a National Printing Press; and establishing a Heritage Centre for the Empowerment of Women and Young People.

Israel

[Original: English]
[12 July 2018]

The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to his note concerning General Assembly resolutions 72/80, 72/81, 72/82 and 72/83 adopted by the Assembly on 7 December 2017, under the agenda item "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".

Israel decided, once again, to vote against those resolutions due to the political motivation that stands behind them and the fact that they represented a one-sided view which fails to reflect the reality on the ground.

I would like to emphasize the underlying position of Israel regarding UNRWA, as was envisaged by Prime Minister Netanyahu at the start of the Israeli Cabinet meeting on 7 January 2018: "UNRWA is an organization that perpetuates the Palestinian refugee problem. It also perpetuates the narrative of the right of return, as it were, in order to eliminate the State of Israel; therefore, UNRWA needs to pass from the world. This is an agency that was established 70 years ago, only for the Palestinian refugees, at a time when the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) deals with global refugee problems. Of course, this creates a situation in which there are great-grandchildren of refugees, who are not refugees but who are cared for by UNRWA, and another 70 years will pass and those great-grandchildren will have great-grandchildren and therefore, this absurdity needs to stop".

Furthermore, the Prime Minister presented the way forward: "UNRWA support funds need to be gradually shifted to UNHCR, with clear criteria for supporting genuine refugees, not fictitious refugees, as happens today under UNRWA. I have brought this position to the attention of the United States of America. This is how to rid the world of UNRWA and deal with genuine refugee problems, to the extent that such remain".

Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks touch upon the fundamental issue of the Agency's definition of "refugee", which goes far beyond the accepted international definitions and criteria for refugees. Rather than narrowing the problem in order to solve it, the Agency's flexible definition has widened it, with refugee status now applying to the fourth generation of Palestinians, dramatically increasing the number of registered refugees from an estimated 700,000 back in 1949 (UNRWA claim) to more than 5,000,000.

By perpetuating Palestinian refugees' status, instead of finding durable solutions to eliminate their refugee status, UNRWA demonstrates that it is part of the problem and not part of the solution. Moreover, the perpetuation of their refugee status and the Palestinian "refugee" narrative amounts to support of only one solution: the return of 5 million Palestinians to Israeli territory, an objective Israel rejects categorically because it undermines the prospects to reach a peace agreement for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and threatens the character of Israel as the world's only Jewish State.

Israel remains deeply concerned regarding the Agency's persistent and cynical use of humanitarian funding for the purpose of advocacy, which runs contrary to the efforts to achieve a political solution. It is unacceptable for a United Nations agency to actively support a biased narrative about the conflict in the region, while utilizing the refugee situation as the primary means of achieving this goal. UNRWA should stick to its original humanitarian mandate while refraining from one-sided politicized advocacy.

Another grave concern arose during the past year as UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness admitted, once again, in October 2017, that UNRWA had exposed a tunnel under one of its schools in Gaza. This was the second tunnel that UNRWA had discovered in a period of a couple of months. According to the announcement: "UNRWA robustly intervened with relevant parties to protest the violation of the sanctity and disrespect of the neutrality of United Nations premises. The presence of a tunnel underneath an UNRWA installation ... is unacceptable. It places children and Agency staff at risk, and UNRWA demands full respect for the neutrality and inviolability of United Nations premises at all times".

The discovery of a second terror tunnel, operating directly under the classrooms of children, is not an isolated incident, but rather part of Hamas' systematic effort to exploit the organs of the United Nations. However, UNRWA deliberately chooses to omit any direct mention of Hamas' responsibility and of its common practice to misuse United Nations and civilian infrastructure. It is of utmost importance to ensure that all United Nations-affiliated agencies, and especially UNRWA, remain neutral and safeguarded from abuse by terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, in the past months, Israel has faced a series of provocative, premeditated mass confrontations along the security fence between Gaza Strip and Israel. The Palestinian leadership insisted that these demonstrations were peaceful. However, these riots have centred on violence and placed innocent people, both Israeli and Palestinian, in grave danger. Hamas terrorists, hiding behind women and children being exploited as human shields, have burned tires on the fence, thrown Molotov cocktails, planted explosive devices and even attempted to forcibly breach the fence and infiltrate Israeli territory. Twice, extremely violent Palestinian rioters penetrated the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, causing major damage to the fuel terminal and conveyer and thus harming the sole lifeline of the Gaza Strip. Not only that, but protesters keep sending on a daily basis flaming kites over the fence, spreading forest fires across the southern agricultural lands of Israel, threatening human lives, causing severe environmental damage and creating a heavy economic toll.

Despite the reality on the ground, we have seen time and time again UNRWA public statements and tweets exempting Hamas of its responsibility and lacking condemnation of the main role of Hamas in these events. Moreover, UNRWA policies only encourage Hamas to keep using civilians, including UNRWA students, for the sole purpose of inciting violence and thus distracting the world from Hamas' decade-long control of the Gaza Strip and its detrimental impact on the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in the area. As we have seen in the past months, especially regarding the riots events on the Gaza border, UNRWA public statements clearly indicate its growing leniency towards advocacy in the service of Hamas, rather than focusing on relief and humanitarian assistance in the best interest of the Palestinian people in Gaza. By doing so, UNRWA only exacerbates the unnecessary human suffering of innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Despite the acute security threats, Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. The United Nations-backed Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has enabled, since October 2014, the entrance of over 10.33 million tons of various types of construction materials into the Gaza Strip, of them 3.28 million tons during 2017 alone. As of December 2017, 127,187 damaged housing units had been renovated out of a total of 130,000. More than 19,262 new housing units are in advanced stages of construction, while hundreds are ready for occupancy. Hundreds of public projects, including schools, clinics, mosques and parks, have been completed or are near completion. Delays in reconstruction stem predominantly from the actions of Hamas and its conflict with the Palestinian Authority, including the latter's decision to keep suspending payments for salaries in Gaza, and a lack of international funding for the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. It is important to note

that Israel is committed to enabling the delivery of humanitarian assistance and continues to provide electrical power and water, as well as the entry of goods for the people of Gaza.

In conclusion, Israel would like to re-emphasize Prime Minister Netanyahu's stance vis-à-vis UNRWA, which calls for a gradual shifting of its support funds to UNHCR, while defining clear criteria as to who is a "genuine refugee" and who is a "fictitious refugee". However, until this vision is put into practice, UNRWA and its workers must keep high standards of impartiality, as expected from all United Nations employees. UNRWA must return to its original mandate as a relief and humanitarian agency, instead of distorting facts and presenting them in one-sided reports and statements that only heighten tensions between the parties.

Japan

[Original: English]
[30 June 2018]

The Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, with reference to the latter's note verbale dated 4 May 2018, has the honour to inform him of the following actions taken by the Government of Japan in the implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 72/81, with regard to UNRWA.

Financial contribution

Description	*Amount*	*Disbursement date*
Supplementary budget	US$ 23 509 061	19 March
Core contribution	US$ 1 679 758	25 April
Food assistance	¥600 000 000 (US$ 5 357 143)	–
Emergency grant aid	US$ 10 000 000	19 June

Contribution to expand/diversify donor-base

Japan initiated the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development, which is a regional conference to discuss assistance to Palestine by utilizing the resources and experiences of economic development of East Asian countries.

The Senior Officials' Meeting and the Ministerial-level Meeting were organized in May and June 2018, respectively. In these meetings, individual sessions dedicated to UNRWA were set up in order for UNRWA to reach out to Asian countries and further expand/diversify its donor base.

New Zealand

[Original: English]
[21 May 2018]

The Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General and has the honour to refer to his letter dated 4 May 2018 concerning his reporting responsibility under paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 72/81 and paragraph 6 of Assembly resolution 72/83, under the agenda item "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".

The Permanent Mission of New Zealand is pleased to inform the Secretary-General that New Zealand made an early payment of its annual $NZ 1 million contribution to UNRWA in March 2018. It is also pleased to inform the Secretary-General that it made an additional, US$ 1 million contribution to UNRWA as part of its 2018 emergency appeals, as announced at the UNRWA Extraordinary Ministerial Conference, held in Rome in March 2018.

Portugal

[Original: English]
[29 June 2018]

The Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and has the honour to refer to the Department's communication dated 4 May 2018 concerning the request for information on measures taken in the implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions 72/80, 72/81, 72/82 and 72/83 adopted under agenda item 53, on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The Permanent Mission has the honour to report the actions below taken by Portugal to implement the provisions contained in the aforementioned resolutions to aid and assist Palestine refugees and support the operations of UNRWA.

In 2017, in addition to an annual voluntary contribution of US$ 20,000, Portugal disbursed an additional contribution of €100,000.

In 2018, Portugal has made an advance disbursement of the same annual voluntary contribution (US$ 20,000) and, in response to the calls of the Secretary-General to support UNRWA in overcoming the current financial crisis, has disbursed an additional contribution of €50,000.

Turkey

[Original: English]
[6 July 2018]

The Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations and, with reference to the note verbale dated 4 May 2018, has the honour to transmit herewith the contribution of Turkey for the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Turkey considers UNRWA a vital actor for the continued well-being of more than 5 million Palestinian refugees. Its operations and services are also essential for the national security and welfare of the host countries, making it an important factor for stability in this volatile region.

Turkey, together with Switzerland, has played an instrumental role in the development of the March 2017 report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, in which he called upon all concerned parties to come together and secure the Agency's financial future.

In 2017, Turkey assumed the Vice Chairmanship of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and, as of 1 July 2018, took over the Chairmanship, adding a new dimension to its relations with the Agency.

Following the reduction of the contributions to the UNRWA budget, the Agency's ability to continue to cater to the vital needs of Palestinians has been more precarious than ever.

It is clear that these additional restrictions to the Agency's budget will have a negative impact on the lives of Palestinian refugees and hamper the efforts towards a two-State political solution and regional stability.

Turkey had advanced and transferred its annual contribution of US$ 1.5 million.

At the UNRWA Extraordinary Ministerial Conference in Rome, Turkey announced and disbursed an additional US$ 10 million.

Turkey also granted US$ 1.2 million to the World Health Organization for the treatment of wounded Palestinians.

Turkey launched a national donation mobilization for Palestine refugees to support the UNRWA "Dignity is Priceless" campaign.

Turkey has also increased its yearly flour contributions to 26 thousand tons and distributed it through the Agency.

In coping with the Agency's financial shortcomings, it would be highly beneficial to set up mechanisms that would allow for continuous and sustainable modes of financing. One such mechanism is the Waqf Fund to help Palestinian Refugees that is planned to be made operational under the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Turkey welcomes the decision to establish the said fund which was incorporated in the final communiqué of the Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), held in Istanbul on 18 May 2018.

During its Chairmanship of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, in coordination with the UNRWA Secretariat, Turkey would like to place special emphasis on the recommendations of the Secretary-General mentioned in his report of March 2017.

United Arab Emirates

[Original: English]
[21 June 2018]

The present report follows the implementation by the United Arab Emirates of General Assembly resolutions 72/80, 72/81, 72/82 and 72/83, with a focus on the following recommendations:

- Increased assistance to Palestinian refugees
- Strengthened efforts to meet the anticipated needs of the Agency, including with regard to increased expenditures and needs arising from conflicts and instability in the region and the serious socioeconomic and humanitarian situation
- Increased special allocations by Member States to Palestine refugees for higher education grants and scholarships
- Maximized use of resources and reduced funding shortfalls, especially in the Agency's programme budget, which is funded primarily by voluntary contributions from Member States and intergovernmental organizations, and which faces persistent shortfalls that are increasingly threatening the delivery of the Agency's core programmes of assistance to Palestine refugees

Earmarked voluntary contributions

The United Arab Emirates one of highest donors to UNRWA and its programmes, with a contribution of US$ 1,800,000 and US$ 800,000 towards the general operational budget of UNRWA programmes.

Humanitarian contributions to the Agency across its various sectors

The contributions of United Arab Emirates to UNRWA during 2013–2018 amounted to US$ 96,417,291, that were distributed as follows:

- **Palestine**: The United Arab Emirates provided foreign aid to UNRWA in the amount of US$ 76,561,232, that included emergency food assistance to Palestinian refugees, as well as support for education, commodity assistance, medical assistance, social services and civil development
- **Syrian Arab Republic**: The United Arab Emirates provided US$ 15,402,940 in foreign aid to UNRWA, which included emergency food assistance to Palestinians in the Syrian Arab Republic
- **Education**: The United Arab Emirates contributed US$ 15,000,000 to cover the UNRWA budget deficit and cover the needs of the education sector in the Gaza Strip for the academic year 2015/16. It also provided the same amount for the academic year 2016/17. As for the academic year 2017/18, the United Arab Emirates earmarked US$ 11,000,000.

Financial stability of the agency

General Assembly resolution 71/93, which in its draft had been co-sponsored by the State of Palestine, urged relevant entities to explore all potential ways and means, including through voluntary and assessed contributions, to ensure that the Agency's funding is sufficient, predictable and sustained for the duration of its mandate. The resolution also included a proposal for Member States to increase their voluntary contributions to the Agency's programme budget to a level, in percentage terms, that is at least equivalent to the percentage that they contribute to the United Nations regular budget.

This will require the approval of States in supporting the aforementioned draft resolution which will entail an annual financial contribution that is higher than usual.

Position of the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is supportive of the aforementioned draft resolution.

State of Palestine

[Original: English]
[13 July 2018]

The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and has the honour to refer to the note regarding the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its seventy-second session under the agenda item "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East". The present note conveys the positions of the Government of the State of Palestine regarding the adoption and implementation of these important resolutions in this critical period being endured by both the Palestine refugees and UNRWA.

As we mark this year the seventieth anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba of 1948 and the passage of 51 years since the onset of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, the question of the Palestine refugees and displaced persons remains among the highest priorities for the State of Palestine and continues to constitute one of the core issues that must be justly resolved, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, in order to achieve a peaceful and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine in its all aspects.

The Palestine refugees, more than 5.4 million of whom are registered with UNRWA, have been denied their rights for more than seven decades, foremost the denial of their right to return to live in peace in their homes and to just compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. As Israel continues to deny and obstruct the realization of these rights, the Palestine refugees, including men, women and children across nearly four generations, have been forced to continue to endure exile, dispossession, dispersion, hardships and marginalization. Their plight has been severely exacerbated in the recent period by recurrent violence, crises and deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly the Gaza Strip, as well as by regional instability, particularly the ongoing devastating conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, with its serious impact on Jordan and Lebanon and the Palestine refugee communities in those host countries.

The continued failure of the international community to end their plight, based on international legitimacy, central to which are resolution 194 (III) and all subsequent relevant resolutions, has seriously compounded the vulnerability and the suffering and indignities being endured by the Palestine refugees, leaving them at this moment in great despair, with little hope for a better future, and with a greater reliance on UNRWA, as a main provider of relief, protection and human development assistance.

The absence of a just solution has made the annual adoption of General Assembly resolutions under an agenda item on UNRWA — which include resolutions 72/80 on assistance to Palestine refugees, 72/81 on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities, 72/82 on operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and 72/83 on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues — even more necessary and indispensable. Pending a just solution, it remains imperative that the Assembly reaffirm the rights and fundamental principles pertaining to the question of Palestine refugees, as well as authorize the provision of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief support to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in order to ensure their well-being, protection and human development. In this regard, the mandate of UNRWA and the strong, long-standing international support for the Agency, in recognition of its vital services to Palestine refugees and its tangible contribution to regional stability, remain equally indispensable.

As conflicts and political instabilities intensify and spread, straining economies and social systems in our region and deepening human insecurity, the Palestine refugee population is particularly affected and is faced by unprecedented challenges that require the international community to scale up humanitarian aid to meet the immediate needs of Palestine refugees, including children and young people, to avoid an even more dangerous deterioration of the situation. Addressing the severe financial crisis of UNRWA by providing immediate funding to remedy the immense shortfall and also providing more sufficient and predictable support to the Agency's mandate, is a matter of urgency in order to ensure the continuity of its education, health, relief and emergency programmes and avert any suspension of such assistance, which

would have a disruptive and far-reaching impact, undermining both the situation of Palestine refugees and the stability of their host countries.

In this regard, we must highlight the ever-worsening plight of the refugee population in the Gaza Strip, now numbering approximately 1.3 million people, particularly as a result of the dire humanitarian crisis that has prevailed there for a decade and the constant decline of socioeconomic conditions due to the ongoing occupation, illegal blockade and repeated devastating military aggressions of Israel. This acute humanitarian situation has inflicted immense pressure on an already fragile civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools and severely depleted resources, and caused unprecedented loss of livelihood, unemployment and poverty, with increased food insecurity and aid dependency among nearly the entire population of the Gaza Strip, mostly affecting refugee families. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the refugee community, particularly Bedouins, are disproportionately affected by the violence and oppressive and illegal policies and practices of the Israeli occupation, including its persistent policy of forced displacement and transfer of civilians, especially in relation to its illegal settlement activities, as well as the demolition of homes and destruction of livelihood, making Palestine refugee families more vulnerable, with rising needs.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, the impact of the catastrophic conflict there on Palestine refugees has been grave. Many have been displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic after the destruction of their camps, while thousands have fled to neighbouring countries in search of safety, particularly Lebanon and Jordan. As reflected in recent reports, at least 95 per cent of the Palestine refugee population in the Syrian Arab Republic has become dependent on UNRWA for subsistence since the advent of the conflict in 2011. In Lebanon, the most vulnerable of the Palestine refugees, among them those that have fled the Syrian Arab Republic, continue to struggle with abject poverty, insecurity, marginalization and lack of opportunity. While the situation of Palestine refugees in Jordan remained stable, pressures stemming from the influx of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and negative socioeconomic conditions are straining the ability to meet the basic needs of refugee families, deepening anxiety and uncertainty among the population.

Against this backdrop of rising tensions, instability and needs, it is imperative that the international community continue to advocate for the rights of the Palestine refugees, to support the mandate of UNRWA and its uninterrupted provision of services in all fields of operation, and to ensure a dignified life for them and their families. UNRWA assistance is crucial for their protection and social resilience, which is essential for the stability of these communities and their host countries, which is equally essential for preserving the prospects for peace and fostering its realization. Since the commencement of its operations in 1950, the Agency has played this crucial, indispensable role, providing education, health, relief and social services and emergency assistance to the Palestine refugees, alleviating their suffering and strengthening their resilience, and it is vital that this role is sustained during these critical times.

Along with its core education, health and relief and social programmes, which have immeasurably benefitted the Palestine refugees, serving as a lifeline for the most vulnerable and abject poor among them, the Agency has also contributed significantly to the human development of the refugee population, ensuring their ability to be productive members of their communities, society and host countries. Among the key services in this regard have been the provision of vocational training, sports and recreation, microfinance and micro-enterprise capacity-building, particularly for young people and women, as well as promoting economic development and self-reliance, mainstreaming gender equality and providing psychosocial support and counselling. Today's realities make such a hybrid humanitarian and development

mission much more needed, and it is imperative for the international community to provide the Agency with the needed political and financial support that ensures the continuity of the Agency's operations across all fields of operations, in line with all relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolutions 72/80, 72/81, 72/82 and 72/83.

The Government of the State of Palestine remains committed to providing every necessary facilitation and support for UNRWA to be able to fully implement its mandate, as per General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 and all subsequent resolutions through to those adopted most recent by the Assembly at its seventy-second session. It is the firm position of the Government that such support is vital for ameliorating the living conditions of the Palestine refugees, pending the achievement of a just solution for their plight, on the basis of resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative. Moreover, it remains insistent, in its advocacy on behalf of the Palestine refugees and their rights, that such a just solution is absolutely essential for ultimately achieving a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine as a whole and lasting Palestinian-Israeli peace.

The Palestinian Government, represented by Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, is very keen to continue its regular consultation with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA with a view to addressing the operational concerns and challenges facing the Palestine refugee community as well as the Agency in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to ensure the proper coordination with the Directors of Operations in the West Bank and Gaza. Equally, the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations stands ready to continue it constant cooperation with the UNRWA Representative Office in New York on all of these important matters and to ensure the necessary legislation in the General Assembly to address the needs and challenges faced by the Agency in the implementation of its mandate and to ensure the necessary support, including through advocacy and outreach, to redress the unprecedented financial crisis being faced by UNRWA.

In addition, the Palestine Liberation Organization Department of Refugee Affairs continues to work with relevant stakeholders, including with donors, host countries and members and observers of the Advisory Commission, in order to maintain international and regional firm support for the rights of the Palestine refugees and for the mandate and operations of UNRWA. It is responsible for the coordination with the host countries to ensure unity of positions on the Palestine refugee question and to support the implementation of the relevant General Assembly resolutions within the framework of the League of Arab States and OIC.

In this connection, the State of Palestine continues to appeal for support to UNRWA at the United Nations, whether at the General Assembly or the Security Council, as well as in different platforms and international forums, including within the framework of the Arab Group, the Group of 77 and China, OIC, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Palestine has also actively engaged in successive ministerial meetings in support of UNRWA, including the most recent meetings, namely its Extraordinary Ministerial Conference held in Rome on 15 March 2018, the Pledging Conference held in New York on 25 June 2018 and the third Ministerial Meeting of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, held in Bangkok on 27 June 2018.

Furthermore, the State of Palestine continues to exert efforts with concerned partners to follow-up on the March 2017 report of the Secretary-General on UNRWA (A/71/849) and the recommendations made therein towards securing more sufficient, sustainable and predictable funding for the Agency, as called for by the General Assembly. Despite the regrettable inability to achieve progress towards a larger

assessed contribution to UNRWA to cover essential operating costs beyond international staff, Palestine has worked cooperatively with all concerned Member States and with the Agency to advocate and mobilize efforts with regard to other actionable recommendations. This has been reflected in the relevant provisions of resolution 72/82, on the operations of UNRWA, which was again adopted by an overwhelming majority.

In the implementation of these provisions, Palestine has actively engaged with OIC and its Member States, including during the forty-fourth session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in July 2017, to foster the necessary support for the adoption of a decision regarding the establishment of a fund — waqf — to support Palestine refugees, with UNRWA as the implementing partner, and requesting IDB to prepare a study in this regard. The IDB proposal, issued in March 2018, was welcomed by the most recent OIC Council of Foreign Ministers at its forty-fifth session, held in Dhaka in May 2018, and the establishment of the waqf was decisively called for during by the Extraordinary Summit of OIC, held in Turkey on 14 May 2018.

The State of Palestine will continue all efforts to follow up on this important matter with OIC as a partner, and will also continue to exert all efforts to help the Agency close the funding shortfall it faces. Here, we must note both the enormity of the financial deficit due to the decision of the United States in January 2018 to dramatically reduce its voluntary contribution by US$ 300 million and the enormity of the destabilizing impact this has had and devastating consequences if the current funding gap cannot be closed to ensure the continuity of UNRWA services. This crisis serves as a stark reminder that the only permanent and sustainable solution for the Palestine refugee question is a political one, by which their rights can be ensured, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 194 (III).

Until the achievement of such a just solution, the plight of the Palestine refugees will tragically continue to demand international attention and compassion. Thus, the annual General Assembly resolutions under the agenda item on UNRWA remain relevant and must once again be considered during the seventy-third session of the Assembly, and their implementation must be firmly supported and actively pursued, as a contribution to ensuring the well-being, dignity and humanity of the Palestine refugees, as a contribution towards regional stability, and as a genuine contribution towards the ultimate achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace of the question of Palestine, which is vital for peace in the Middle East, as per the longstanding international consensus.